

CHAPTER 16.1-07

ABSENT VOTERS' BALLOTS AND ABSENTEE VOTING

16.1-07-01. Absent voter - Who may vote.

1. Any qualified elector of this state, including an individual who is in the armed forces of the United States, is in the merchant marine of the United States, or is a United States citizen living outside the United States who resided in this state immediately prior to the individual's departure from the United States, may vote an absent voter's ballot at any general, special, or primary state election, any county election, or any city or school district election.
2. A citizen of the United States who is eighteen years of age or older, has never lived in the United States, and whose parent is a qualified elector of the state may vote absentee in this state pursuant to this chapter if the individual:
 - a. Does not maintain a domicile;
 - b. Is not registered to vote in any other state, territory, or possession of the United States;
 - c. Is not voting in any other state, territory, or possession of the United States; and
 - d. Possesses a valid passport or card of identity and registration issued under the authority of the secretary of state of the United States.

Such an elector may vote only in federal elections, which means any election held solely or in part for the purpose of electing or nominating any candidate for the office of president, vice president, presidential elector, member of the United States senate, or member of the United States house of representatives.

3. An elector who votes by absentee ballot may not vote in person at the same election.

16.1-07-02. Elector may vote before leaving - No voting in person upon return.

Repealed by S.L. 1997, ch. 192, § 5.

16.1-07-03. Preparation and printing of ballots. For all general, primary, or special state elections, for all other special elections held at the same time as a general or primary election, for all county elections, and for all city and school elections official ballots must be prepared within the time limits provided in section 16.1-07-04. In the case of special elections wherein the election is called less than forty or twenty days, as the case may be, before the election day, or where certification of candidates does not take place before the forty-day or twenty-day limitations, the ballots for the use of absentee voters must be made available as soon as possible. Only official ballots may be used as absentee ballots and no indication may be noted on such ballots that they are used by absentee voters except that the return envelope must be marked "ballot of absentee voter". The county auditor, at the same time other absentee ballots are prepared, shall prepare, and have printed and available, ballots for use by overseas citizens qualified to vote in this state pursuant to section 16.1-07-01.

16.1-07-04. When ballots furnished proper officials. The county auditor, or any other officer required by law to prepare any general, special, or primary state election ballots or any county election ballots, shall prepare, have printed, and deliver to the county auditor at least forty days before the holding of any general, special, or primary state election a sufficient number of absent voter ballots for the use of all voters likely to require such ballots for that election. In city or school elections, the auditor or clerk of the city, the business manager of the school district, or any other officer required by law to prepare city or school election ballots shall prepare and have printed and available for distribution to the public at least twenty days before the holding of any

city or school election a sufficient number of absent voter ballots for the use of all voters likely to require such ballots for that election. Officers authorized to distribute absent voter's ballots under this chapter shall ensure all ballots used as absent voter's ballots are secure at all times and accessible only to those persons under the officer's supervision for distribution.

16.1-07-05. Time for applying for ballot - Applications and voting for uniformed citizens and for citizens living outside the United States - Emergency situations - Sufficient time for application and ballot return.

1. At any time in an election year, any qualified elector may apply to the county auditor, the auditor or clerk of the city, or the business manager of the school district, as the case may be, by facsimile or otherwise, for an official ballot to be voted at that election. A voter may obtain an application form for an absent voter's ballot for a general, special, primary, or county election from either the county auditor or a city auditor. The application form must include a space for the applicant to indicate whether the application is for all statewide elections in the calendar year or only for the election that is immediately after the date of the application.
2. An applicant who is a qualified elector and on active duty as a member of the United States armed forces or the United States merchant marine may receive an absentee ballot by mail, facsimile, or electronic mail. In the event that returning the voted ballot by mail is not practicable, qualified electors meeting the stated criteria of this subsection may return a voted ballot and other required documents to the county auditor by means of facsimile transmission or electronic mail. To return a voted ballot and other required documents by electronic mail, the eligible voter must have access to the technology to scan the documents, save the documents in a secure format approved by the secretary of state, and return the documents as an electronic mail attachment directly to the electronic mail address assigned by the auditor, clerk, or business manager for that purpose prior to midnight in the voter's county of residence on the day before the election. The secretary of state shall develop written guidelines relating to security measures for voted ballots returned by electronic mail.
3. Spouses, children, or other dependents of active duty members of the United States armed forces or merchant marine who are qualified electors and stationed as a family outside the United States are granted the same absentee voting rights as the individual's spouse, parent, or guardian has under subsection 2.
4. An applicant who is a qualified elector living outside the United States may receive an absentee ballot by mail, facsimile, or electronic mail. If returning the voted ballot by mail is not practicable, a qualified elector may return a voted ballot and other required documents to the county auditor by means of facsimile transmission or electronic mail. The elector must have access to the technology to scan the documents, save the documents in a secure format approved by the secretary of state, and return the documents as an electronic mail attachment directly to the electronic mail address assigned by the auditor, clerk, or business manager for that purpose before midnight in the voter's county of residence on the day before the election. The secretary of state shall develop written guidelines relating to security measures for voted ballots returned by electronic mail.
5. No auditor or clerk may issue ballots for absentee voters on the day of the election except to persons prevented from voting in person on the day of the election due to an emergency. A person requesting an absentee ballot on the day of the election due to an emergency must do so through an agent as set forth in this chapter. An agent may represent only one person. The absentee ballot must be returned to the county auditor's office by four p.m. on the day of the election.

6. A completed application must be submitted to the appropriate election official in a timely manner so as to allow the applicant to receive, complete, and mail the absent voter's ballot before the day of the election.

16.1-07-06. Application form.

1. Application for an absent voter's ballot must be made on a form, prescribed by the secretary of state, to be furnished by the proper officer of the county, city, or school district in which the applicant is an elector, on any form, approved by the secretary of state, or any blank containing the following information:
 - a. The applicant's name.
 - b. The applicant's current or most recent North Dakota residential address.
 - c. The applicant's mailing address.
 - d. The applicant's current home telephone number.
 - e. The election for which the ballot is being requested.
 - f. The date of the request.
 - g. An affirmation that the applicant has resided, or will reside, in the precinct for at least thirty days next preceding the election.
 - h. The applicant's signature.
 - i. A space for the voter to include the voter's precinct or voting location, if known.

If the applicant is unable to sign the applicant's name, the applicant shall mark (X) on the application in the presence of a disinterested person. The disinterested person shall print the name of the person marking the X below the X and shall sign the disinterested person's own name following the printed name together with the notation "witness to the mark".

2. The application for a qualified elector serving on active duty as a member of the United States armed forces, merchant marine, or a family member who is a qualified elector and stationed outside the United States together with the individual's spouse, parent, or guardian must include the following additional information if the voter desires to vote by facsimile or electronic mail:
 - a. Facsimile telephone number; or
 - b. Electronic mail address.
3. The application for a qualified elector living outside the United States must include a facsimile telephone number or electronic mail address if the voter desires to vote by facsimile or electronic mail.

16.1-07-07. Delivering application form for ballot. The officers specified in section 16.1-07-05, upon request, shall mail an application form for an absent voter's ballot to the voter, or they may deliver the application form to the voter upon a personal application made at the officer's office. The officers may also make available or distribute the applications, prescribed by the secretary of state, to the public without any specific request being made for the applications.

16.1-07-08. Delivering ballots - Envelope accompanying - Statement on envelope - Challenging electors voting by absentee ballot - Inability of elector to sign name.

1. Upon receipt of an application for an official ballot properly filled out and duly signed, or as soon thereafter as the official ballot for the precinct in which the applicant resides has been prepared, the county auditor, city auditor, or business manager of the school district, as the case may be, shall send to the absent voter by mail, at the expense of the political subdivision conducting the election, one official ballot, or personally deliver the ballot to the applicant or the applicant's agent, which agent may not, at that time, be a candidate for any office to be voted upon by the absent voter. The agent shall sign the agent's name before receiving the ballot and deposit with the auditor or business manager of the school district, as the case may be, authorization in writing from the applicant to receive the ballot or according to requirements set forth for signature by mark. The auditor or business manager of the school district, as the case may be, may not provide an absent voter's ballot to a person acting as an agent who cannot provide a signed, written authorization from an applicant. No person may receive compensation, including money, goods, or services, for acting as an agent for an elector, nor may a person act as an agent for more than four electors in any one election. A voter voting by absentee ballot may not require the political subdivision providing the ballot to bear the expense of the return postage for an absentee ballot.
2. If there is more than one ballot to be voted by an elector of the precinct, one of each kind must be included and an envelope must be enclosed with the ballot or ballots. The front of the envelope must bear the official title and post-office address of the officer supplying the voter with the ballot and upon the other side a printed voter's affidavit in substantially the following form:

Precinct _____
Name _____
Residential Address _____
City _____ ND Zip Code _____
Under penalty of possible criminal prosecution for making a false statement, I swear that I reside at the residential address provided above, that I have resided in my precinct for at least thirty days next preceding the election, and this is the only ballot I will cast in this election.
Applicant's Signature _____
Date _____

If the absent voter is unable to sign the voter's name, the voter shall mark (X) on the statement in the presence of a disinterested person. The disinterested person shall print the name of the person marking the X below the X and shall sign the disinterested person's own name following the printed name together with the notation "witness to the mark".

3. Each person requesting an absent voter's ballot under this chapter must be provided a set of instructions, prescribed by the secretary of state, sufficient to describe the process of voting by absent voter's ballot. The voting instructions must contain a statement informing the individual that the individual is entitled to complete the absent voter's ballot in secrecy.
4. Each individual requesting an absent voter's ballot under this chapter who cannot read the English language or who because of blindness or other disability is unable to mark the voter's ballot, upon request, may receive the assistance of any person of the voter's choice, other than the voter's employer, an officer or agent of the voter's union, a candidate running in that election, or a relative of a candidate as described in subsection 2 of section 16.1-05-02, in marking the voter's ballot.

16.1-07-08.1. Procedures for voting with special write-in or federal write-in absentee ballot.

1. Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a qualified absentee elector may apply to the county auditor for a special write-in absentee ballot. This ballot may be used to vote for presidential electors and members of the United States senate and of the United States house of representatives.
2. The application for a special write-in absentee ballot may be made on a form prescribed by the secretary of state. In order to qualify for a special write-in absentee ballot, the voter shall state on the application that the voter is unable to vote by regular absentee ballot or in person due to requirements of military service or due to living in isolated or extremely remote areas of the world.
3. Upon receipt of the application, the county auditor shall issue the special write-in absentee ballot, which must be in the form prescribed by the secretary of state. The ballot must permit the elector to vote by writing in a party preference for each office, the names of specific candidates for each office, or the name of the person whom the voter prefers for each office.
4. If the voter is temporarily residing outside the United States or is a member of the United States armed forces, merchant marine, or a family member and a qualified elector, the voter may use the federal write-in absentee ballot in general, special, and primary elections for local, state, or federal offices.
5. If the voter is residing outside the United States, or is a member of the United States armed forces, merchant marine, or a family member, and a qualified elector stationed outside the United States, the voter may use the federal write-in absentee ballot transmission envelope as an absentee ballot application simultaneously with the submission of the federal write-in absentee ballot if the voter is otherwise eligible to vote absentee in the jurisdiction where the request is submitted.

16.1-07-09. Canvassing of mailed absent voters' ballots received late. In the case of congressional, state, county, city, or school district elections, if an envelope postmarked or otherwise officially marked by the United States postal service or other mail delivery system before the date of election and containing an absent voter's ballot is received by the officer too late to be forwarded to the proper voting precinct in time to be tabulated, the ballot must be tallied by the canvassing board of the county, the governing body of the city, or the school board of the school district, as the case may be, at the time the returns are canvassed. Any envelope without a postmark or other official marking by the United States postal service or other mail delivery system or with an illegible postmark or other official marking and containing an absentee voter's ballot must be received by mail by the proper officer within two days after the election to be canvassed and counted. An absent voter may personally deliver the absent voter's ballot to the appropriate officer's office at any time before five p.m. on the day before the election. Before forwarding any ballot to a canvassing board pursuant to this section, the officer forwarding the ballot shall print the date of receipt on the envelope. Upon receipt, the canvassing board shall first determine that the elector was qualified to vote in that precinct and that the elector did not previously vote in that precinct on the date of the election before allowing the ballot to be tallied.

16.1-07-10. Care and custody of ballot. Upon receipt of an envelope containing the absent voter's ballot, the proper officer immediately shall attach the written application of the absent voter and file the ballot with other absentee ballots from the same precinct. Before delivering the absentee ballots to the precinct, the proper officer shall package the ballots in a manner so the ballots are sealed securely. The package must be endorsed with the name of the proper voting precinct, the name and official title of the officer, and the words "This package contains an absent voter's ballot and must be opened only on election day at the polls while the polls are open." The officer shall keep the package safely in the officer's office until it is delivered by the officer as provided in this chapter.

16.1-07-11. Submitting ballot to inspector of elections. If the envelope containing the absent voter's ballot is received by the county auditor, auditor or clerk of the city, or business manager of the school district, as the case may be, prior to that person's delivery of the sealed

package containing the official ballots to the inspector of elections of the precinct in which such absent voter resides, such ballot, after having been enclosed with the application in an envelope as required by section 16.1-07-10, must be enclosed in such package and delivered therewith to the inspector of the precinct. If the official ballots for the precinct have been delivered to the election inspector at the time of receipt by the proper officer of the absent voter's ballot, then the officer shall immediately mail the same postage prepaid to the election inspector or the officer or the officer's deputy may personally deliver it to the inspector. Any absent voter's ballot sent to the wrong precinct by the official whose duty it is to forward such ballots to the precincts, or any absent voter's ballot received by the inspector from the appropriate officer too late to be counted at the precinct, must be returned to the official by the election inspector, and must be tallied by the county canvassing board, the governing body of the city, or the school board, as the case may be, with other absent voters' ballots received too late to be forwarded to the precinct.

16.1-07-12. Opening ballot - Voting or rejecting - Depositing in ballot box - Preserving. At any time between the opening and closing of the polls on election day, the election judges of the relevant precinct first shall open the outer envelope and compare the signature on such application for an absent voter's ballot with the signature on the statement provided for in section 16.1-07-08. If the judges find that the statement is sufficient and that the signatures correspond, and that the applicant is then a duly qualified elector of such precinct and has not voted at the election, they shall open the absent voter's envelope in such manner as not to destroy the statement thereon. They shall take out the ballot or ballots contained therein without unfolding the same, or permitting the same to be opened or examined, and after initialing the same as other ballots are initialed, they shall deposit the ballot in the proper ballot box and show in the pollbook of the election that the elector has voted. If the statement is found to be insufficient, or that the signatures do not correspond, or that the applicant is not then a duly qualified elector of the precinct, the vote may not be allowed, but without opening the absent voter's envelope, the election inspector or election judge shall mark across the face thereof "rejected as defective" or "rejected as not an elector", as the case may be. These rejected ballots are then turned over to the county canvassing board for final determination of eligibility. The subsequent death of an absentee voter after having voted by absentee ballot does not constitute grounds for rejecting such ballot.

16.1-07-12.1. Absentee ballot precinct - Election board appointment - Ballot counting.

1. For any primary, general, or special statewide, district, or county election, the board of county commissioners may create a special precinct, known as an absentee ballot precinct, for the purpose of counting all absentee ballots cast in an election in that county. The election board of the absentee ballot precinct must be known as the absentee ballot counting board. The county auditor shall supply the board with all necessary election supplies as provided in chapter 16.1-06.
2. If the board of county commissioners chooses to establish an absentee ballot precinct according to this section, the following provisions apply:
 - a. The county auditor shall appoint the absentee ballot counting board that consists of one independent representative to act as the inspector and an equal number of representatives from each political party represented on an election board in the county, as set forth in section 16.1-05-01, to act as judges. Each official of the board shall take the oath required by section 16.1-05-02 and must be compensated as provided in section 16.1-05-05.
 - b. The county auditor shall have the absentee ballots delivered to the inspector of the absentee ballot counting board with the election supplies, or if received later, then prior to the closing of the polls.
 - c. On the day of the election, the absentee ballot counting board shall occupy a location designated by the county auditor which must be open to any person for the purpose of observing the counting process.

- d. The absentee ballots must be opened and handled as required in section 16.1-07-12. The absentee ballot counting board may commence counting the absentee ballots at the same time as any precinct within the county, city, or legislative district opens its polls. As soon as all the polls in the county, city, or legislative district close and the count is completed, the inspector shall announce publicly the results. The board shall comply with the requirements of sections 16.1-15-04 through 16.1-15-12, as applicable.

16.1-07-13. Registration of absent voters' ballots on electronic voting systems. At polling places using electronic voting systems, absent voters' ballots, if any, must be entered in secrecy by the two election judges. The absentee electronic voting system ballots prepared pursuant to this section must be deposited in the ballot boxes and counted as other ballots. If the electronic voting system in use so provides, the actual electronic voting system ballot may be used as the absentee ballot.

16.1-07-14. Penalty. Any person who violates any of the provisions of this chapter is guilty of a class A misdemeanor.

16.1-07-15. Early voting precinct - Election board appointment - Closing and canvassing.

1. For any primary, general, or special statewide, district, or county election, the board of county commissioners may, before the sixtieth day before the day of the election, create a special precinct, known as an early voting precinct, to facilitate the conduct of early voting in that county according to chapters 16.1-13 and 16.1-15. The election board of the early voting precinct must be known as the early voting precinct election board. The county auditor shall supply the board with all necessary election supplies as provided in chapter 16.1-06.
2. If the board of county commissioners establishes an early voting precinct according to this section, the following provisions apply:
 - a. Early voting must be authorized during the fifteen days immediately before the day of the election. The county auditor shall designate the business days and times during which the early voting election precinct will be open and publish notice of the dates and times in the official county newspaper once each week for three consecutive weeks immediately before the day of the election.
 - b. The county auditor shall appoint the early voting precinct election board that consists of one independent representative to act as the inspector and an equal number of representatives from each political party represented on an election board in the county, as set out in section 16.1-05-01, to act as judges. Each official of the board shall take the oath required by section 16.1-05-02 and must be compensated as provided in section 16.1-05-05.
 - c. The county auditor shall designate a space in a government-controlled facility, accessible to the elderly and the physically disabled as provided in section 16.1-04-02, to locate the early voting precinct.
 - d. At the close of each day of early voting, the inspector, along with a judge from each political party represented on the board, shall secure all election-related materials, including:
 - (1) The pollbooks and access to any electronically maintained pollbooks.
 - (2) The ballot boxes containing voted ballots.
 - (3) Any void, spoiled, and unvoted ballots.

- e. Ballot boxes containing ballots cast at an early voting precinct may not be opened until the day of the election except as may be necessary to clear a ballot jam or to move voted ballots to a separate locked ballot box in order to make room for additional ballots.
- f. The early voting precinct may be closed, as provided in chapter 16.1-15, at the end of the last business day designated for early voting in the county. Results from the early voting precinct may be counted, canvassed, or released under chapter 16.1-15 as soon as any precinct within the county, city, or legislative district closes its polls on the day of the election. The county auditor shall designate a location for the closing, counting, and canvassing process under chapter 16.1-15, which location must be open to any person for the purpose of observing.
- g. The early voting precinct election board shall comply with the requirements of chapters 16.1-05, 16.1-13, and 16.1-15, as applicable.

16.1-07-16. Secretary of state to provide information regarding absentee voting for military and overseas voters. The secretary of state is designated as the official responsible for providing information regarding absentee voting by military and overseas citizens eligible to vote in the state according to section 702 of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 [Pub. L. 107-252; 116 Stat. 1666; 42 U.S.C. 1973ff-1]. The secretary of state shall develop and provide uniform procedures for county auditors to follow when transmitting and receiving applications for absentee ballots to and from military and overseas voters.

16.1-07-17. Notification of rejected absentee ballots cast by military and overseas voters. The secretary of state shall establish a uniform procedure for county auditors to follow when notifying a military or overseas voter that the voter's absentee ballot was rejected. The procedure must provide that the notice include the reason why the voter's absentee ballot was rejected as provided by section 707 of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 [Pub. L. 107-252; 116 Stat. 1666; 42 U.S.C. 1973ff-1].